CONFIDENTIAL

The Government of a Neutral Afghanistan

No government that pursues Marxist goals or depends on Soviet troops for survival is likely to be acceptable to the Afghan people. Were Moscow to abandon the Marxist Revolution and reduce its military presence enough so that it clearly could not influence domestic developments, a government could be established that might be both acceptable to the Afghans and in accord with Soviet interests prior to 1978.

For almost 60 years, the Soviet Union was satisfied with an Afghanistan in which it was the preeminent--but not the only--foreign influence. Kabul avoided any direct confrontation with Moscow in its foreign policy, although on occasion it also avoided support for Soviet positions. Moscow did not appear to care what the Afghan government did at home and even tended to overlook actions directed at Afghan Communists.

Legitimacy--which the Marxists have been unable to establish--may be the most important criterion for acceptability of an Afghan government. Traditionally, legitimacy has been determined in two ways--by tribal status and through approval of an assembly of leaders.

For more than two centuries, the country was ruled by the dominant member of the dominant family of the most important tribe. Dynastic changes, such as the installation of the present royal family in 1929, reflected shifts in the relative status of families or tribes. The few Afghan rulers who could not claim legitimacy through tribal status--such as the King installed by the British in 1838, the Tajik bandit who seized power in 1929, and the three Marxist Presidents-- have fared badly.

Although usually the dominant family leader was the king, early in King Zahir Shah's reign his uncles and later his cousin Mohammed Daoud headed the family and ruled the country as Prime Minister. The ease with which Daoud replaced Zahir in 1974, was in large measure due to his also replacing him as head of the family. With Daoud dead and the Zahir apparently retired from politics, their cousin, Prince Abdul Wali is the family leader. There has already been speculation about his heading either an insurgent government or a compromise regime installed by the Soviets. Legitimacy would not depend on his becoming President or Prime Minister, but at least the acquiesence of the royal family would be required for many Afghans to regard their government as legitimate.

In 1747 the first Amir was chosen by an assembly of tribal leaders, and in 1977 President Daoud legitimized his republic

through much the same process when he convened the Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly). Both tradition and Afghan constitutions have made the Loya Jirga the ultimate authority in the country, corresponding very roughly to a constitutional convention in the US. At this point, there is no set procedure for convening the Jirga or selecting its members. Its decisions have been predetermined in the past by the means of selecting its members, but to be credible the Loya Jirga has to be composed of men of local prominence. The Marxists have never attempted to use a Jirga to establish their legitimacy, perhaps because of doubts that they could control one that had popular confidence.

Legitimacy, of course, is not the only problem a government would face in gaining popular acceptance.

The role of the royal family itself could become a problem. Some Afghans blame it for many of the country's problems. Nevertheless, there have been some indications that even anti-monarchists would agree to follow someone such as Abdul Wali to free the country from the Soviets.

The dominant Pushtun ethnic groups would expect to control any government, and the ethnic minorities would resent this control. The problem, however, is one every Afghan government has faced. Although the virtual independence some minorities-- such as the Hazaras of central Afghanistan--have won during the insurgency could make placating them more difficult, the inclusion of minority representatives in the cabinet and guarantee--if only tacit and temporary--of local autonomy would probably make the problem manageable.

There are a number of other interest groups that will also have to be accomodated. Local insurgent leaders are probably far more interested in control of their own areas than in cabinet posts in Kabul, and probably could be placated by selection to a Loya Jirga and considerable local autonomy. In any case, the government is unlikely to be in a position to enforce its authority in much of the country.

Exile groups in Pakistan will also want to participate in the government, and if only to avoid propaganda attacks men such as Ahmad Gailani, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, and Sebqatullah Mojadedi might be included in the cabinet, some probably in important posts.

Officials of former governments such as Abdul Karim Mostagni--one of Daoud's Army commanders, and leaders under the monarchy would probably also be included. Some of the most prominent--including Prime Minister Etemadi, however, have been killed by the Marxists.

To ensure the loyalty of the army, military figures might also play a role in the government. The present Army Commander, General Baba Jan, who also served Daoud and the King conceivably could survive, but most Marxist officers would have little more than their lives.

As a sop to the Soviets, even some figures from the present government could be included. They would, however, have to be among those not closely associated with Marxist repression and to avoid suspicion of Soviet domination would have to be in relatively unimportant positions. Mines Minister Danesh, one of the few Marxists who is an expert in the field he oversees, has survived all the changes under the Marxists, and could survive their removal.

A government that included most of these factions would probably win enough popular acceptance to survive. Although rivalries among its leaders would probably surface quickly, and could lead to frequent cabinet shuffles and even changes in the presidency, they probably would not be serious enough to return the country to civil war. The government might also be too weak to challenge the power of local leaders for sometime, but Afghan governments have never had much authority in rural areas.

Such a government--especially if the exile leaders were included--would be more religiously oriented than either Daoud's republic or the monarchy, and hence more ideologically opposed to Marxism. The Afghan proclivity to seek revenge is likely to mean the death of many who cooperated with the Soviets, and sour relations with Moscow for years. The government, moreover, will have neither the inclination nor the ability to carry out some of the reforms of the Marxists such as land reform and the improvement of the status of women, and the revolution will die. Nevertheless, such a government would probably maintain correct relations with Moscow , and would resist any attempt by its neighbors or Western powers to increase their influence in Afghanistan. If the basic Soviet interest in Afghanistan is to prevent the country from being used by others to harm the USSR, this interest would be satisfied.